

THE 1953 DAVID LEVY YULEE LECTURE

*Honor and Service in Politics*

by

MILLARD F. CALDWELL



January 12, 1953

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

GAINESVILLE

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY THE CONVENTION PRESS  
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

## *Foreword*

ILLARD FILLMORE CALDWELL, 29th Governor of Florida, 1945-48, was born in Tennessee and received his education there, in Mississippi and in Virginia. As a young man, he served his country with distinction during World War I. Following the war, he was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1922.

He came to Florida in 1924 and was admitted to the Florida bar in 1925. His fellow citizens quickly identified him as a public servant of great promise and he served as Prosecuting Attorney and County Attorney for Santa Rosa County and as City Attorney for the City of Milton. Later he was elected to the Florida House of Representatives and served in the sessions of 1929 and 1931.

Millard Caldwell's governmental service has not been limited to the state of Florida. He was elected to the 73rd, 74th, 75th, and 76th Congresses of the United States as a Representative from the Third Florida District. There he served on the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations. His distinguished contribution to politics was further enhanced by his participation as a delegate to the Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union at the Hague in 1938 and the following year at Oslo, Norway. His voluntary retirement from public service in 1941 to resume the practice of law at Milton and Tallahassee lasted but three years, for he was again called upon by the citizens of Florida, this time to serve as their 29th Governor.

With the state and nation emerging from World War II, he devoted himself to the many grave political and social problems following in the wake of that conflict. Pursuing the path of his distinguished predecessor, he vitalized the Citizen's Committee on Education and succeeded in raising the standards of Florida's public education to new high levels. Largely through his efforts the Southern Regional Education Board was created. During the post

war period, his administration was notable for its program of public building construction and expansion of the institutions of higher learning. His influence was felt throughout the nation as Chairman of the National Governor's Conferences of 1946 and 1947 and as President of the Council of State Governments from 1946 to 1948.

In 1950 he was called to Washington as Civil Defense Administrator to take over the then-lagging program so essential to national security. He successfully aroused municipal, county and state governments until at the time of his retirement in 1952, four million citizens had been enrolled in this program. As a valiant leader in politics, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, he well deserves the warm admiration and high esteem of his fellow citizens. It is a privilege to present this significant address by a distinguished public servant.

WILLIAM F. LARSEN, *Director*  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CLEARING SERVICE  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

## *Honor and Service in Politics*

M R. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I am delighted with the privilege and the honor of delivering the Yulee Lecture.

I am cognizant of the fact that under most favorable conditions the mortality rate on lay-lecturers to academic audiences is extremely high. Nevertheless, I propose to launch this discussion in a dangerous fashion and submit, at the outset, five propositions.

Since neither time nor your patience will permit elaboration in every instance, you will, throughout the discourse, be subjected to unsupported assertions of fact. That you may disagree does not disturb me, but I will be disturbed if your interest is so tenuous that I arouse neither disagreement, agreement, nor argument.

Let's take a first quick look at the subject suggested to me for discussion: "Honor and Service in Politics."

Although the words honor and service are by common usage of similar import, they are not synonymous. Service without honor has been noted in the political field but the term "Honor in Politics" connotes service. So, to avoid tangential confusion, I suggest the title be amended to read "Honorable Service in Politics."

Then let us divide the whole of politics into two parts: first, the politics of the private citizen, and, second, the politics of the officeholder. The first is of prime importance and the latter relatively unimportant, the degree of difference being about that of the dog to its tail. And as the dog determines the destiny of its tail, so does the private citizen determine the quality of his official spokesman.

When one thinks of politics, the paunchy man of the checkered vest and big cigar is usually envisaged. When we become dissatisfied with conditions we criticize the officeholder. When we speak of honor and service in politics, we have in mind the fair performance of his official duties by the elected officer. Such impressions

are superficial and bespeak an unawareness of fundamental facts.

A realistic view of the subject matter requires the turning of the mirror so that we may observe that the paunchy wearer of the toga is but the reflection of the people who voted for him; that, reasonably, he cannot be blamed for the bad government foisted upon him by the people in whom honor and intelligent service must originate.

This evening we reverse the order and look at the citizen as the true politician, identifying the elected official as nothing more nor less than the instrumentality through which the citizen expresses his will.

Now for the five propositions:

1. The future of civilization as we know it will be carved in the area of American politics.

2. Whether the future of civilization be bright or dark depends upon the strength of American integrity, economics, and leadership.

3. Whether America's strength is adequate to the need depends, not upon its officialdom, but upon its private citizenship.

4. Whether that private citizenship possesses the increased love of truth and freedom together with the understanding, conviction, and courage necessary to the preservation, in the pending crisis, of all we count worthwhile depends upon the college trained men and women of the recent past, the present, and the immediate future.

5. Every college trained, American man and woman, wittingly or not, is a cog in the political machine and each will influence the end result. Whether that influence is good or bad, whether honorable service or disservice is rendered, is the free, but vital choice of the individuals.

These five propositions pin-point a major responsibility. Let us examine them to see if the reasoning is valid.

Take the first:

"The future of civilization as we know it will be carved in the area of American politics."

You note that I assume that all of the rights to know and to speak the truth, to believe and worship as one will, and, generally,

to be free, constitute the bedrock of civilization as we know it, and that those rights are to be exclusively enjoyed this side of the iron curtain. If this cornerstone does not square with the fact all I have said and will say to you has little value.

But, you ask, logically, even if the assertion touching civilization be true, why must its future be written in the field of American politics. There are several reasons why this is so, any one of which is self-sufficient.

The first reason is that no other nation can nor will assume the leadership of the free peoples — all have thrust that difficult and thankless burden upon the United States. Effective world leadership in this crisis contemplates a nation possessing broad and unselfish vision, peopled by a responsible citizenship, blessed with great resources and a united devotion to freedom. What other nation can even approach qualifying for that task?

Is it possible that Italy or Spain or France, with their horizontal splits in philosophy and their precarious economies, can, in the foreseeable future, develop tangible strength abroad or even at home? Obviously, neutral Switzerland and Sweden are not to be considered. Our neighbors to the South? The question answers itself. England? No, England is old, tired, hungry and on the brink of bankruptcy. In Britain there is still, here and there, a tendency to value continued trade with the Soviet and an unwillingness to jeopardize that trade by openly opposing the Kremlin's ambition. Great Britain is weary of war and bombing and privation and there are those who would rather submit than struggle. Although I am confident that England will be strong when the chips are down, it must be apparent that it cannot now lead the free nations to the unity, firmness, and power needed to stand against Communism.

And so the finger points inevitably to this young and virile nation as the one hope of a free world. We have accepted the challenge and in doing so we have expended lives and dollars in prodigal fashion. If we resign that responsibility and allow the Soviet free reign we must, when it is too late, after the less powerful nations have been swallowed, squander more lives and more dollars. A sad

choice, but there is no other. No responsible person, not even the remnant of isolationists, suggests the possibility of reaching acceptable accord with Communism.

I am sure we are agreed that, in the light of history, the military security of this country will become precarious indeed if we, for a moment, relax our efforts in the hope of any such peaceful accord with Russia. I believe those in Washington charged with the task of charting our course understand that no words of Stalin and no assurance emanating from the Kremlin can in anywise be credited with truth or good faith. The dependable warning of a major military attack against the Democratic countries will, in all probability, be warm words of friendship and an offer to arbitrate our differences.

We must not delude ourselves with the hope that Russia is deterred in its purpose by fear of retaliation. Less than ten per cent of Russia's population is to be found in urban areas. Most of its productive capacity is located away from the congested critical target areas and is relatively secure from atomic attack. Much of its essential manufacturing and many of its key people are housed underground. Human life is counted of little worth and mass destruction cannot break the iron rule which controls the population. All in all, the Kremlin is a deadly enemy, fanatical in its purpose and determined to expand its control.

Although world leadership has been thrust upon us and we have assumed the responsibility, it does not follow, necessarily, that this nation can and will function in that capacity.

Our foreign policy was not an issue in the recent election, but it may be in the next. The voter has the last word. What those on Main street and in the country precincts decide will be Washington's decision.

Whether civilization grows or withers must be determined by this country's leadership or lack of leadership and that question must be answered, not in Washington, but in the homes, the stores and fields of America.

Turn to the second proposition:

"Whether the future of civilization be bright or dark depends upon the strength of American integrity, economics, and leadership."

Even if the people of America agree that we must continue in the vanguard in the struggle against Communist aggression, it is obvious that, without vast reserves of wealth, resources and convictions, we must fail in our efforts to attain the objective.

America was the arsenal which won the two abortive world wars and it must provide the sinews to win the next one—if it comes and if it is won.

Russia's hope is that we may dissipate our strength in depression or inflation or in bankruptcy. If either eventuates in major proportion, the cause may be lost.

Outmoded factories and obsolete machinery cannot convert to war status effectively and quickly. If venture capital is driven from the economic field by confiscatory taxes, new plants and virile industries will not be available. If the independence and self-reliance of our people is sapped by excessive paternalism the essential will to fight may be lost. America can lead and win if its economy and its citizenship remain stable and sound, but it must fail to lead or to win otherwise.

Now, my third premise:

"Whether America's strength is adequate to the need depends, not upon its officialdom, but upon its private citizenship."

Our government is of the representative form. The people in free elections choose the official spokesmen. The officials selected reflect the intelligence and integrity of the voting majority.

For whatever conditions exist in the political affairs of the community, the state or the nation, the people, not the officeholders, are accountable. Less accountable are the uninformed—more responsible are the educated, but, together they stamp the official in their composite likeness.

The public official is the creature of the electorate—he must have gained the preference of the majority of those participating in the election. In doing so, he was either a person willing to stand or fall on his own considered convictions or one willing to ride

with the passing whims and selfish desires of the voter. The former can win if the citizenship is of a stable quality, but the latter, with his appeals to emotion, personal benefits, and group prejudice, is more often than not the victor—and the people the loser.

Back in 1788, while great men of that day were struggling with the foundation stones of our country, Fisher Ames said that he considered "elections as a security that the sober, second thought of the people shall be law."

The demagogue cannot be expected to serve with honor, because he is a stranger to that quality. He has, by the fulsome use of empty promises, tricked an unthinking public. While there may be no basic difference between buying a vote by the promises of an impossible old-age pension and paying money for it, the former is more reprehensible.

But the point is that you cannot hold the demagogue responsible for not serving honorably in politics. Not only will he not rise above his source, he was born that way. The responsibility must rest upon the free, but negligent citizens who made him.

It would be passing strange if one could wade into the Atlantic ocean and dip up a bucket of fresh and pure water. It is just as strange to see an honorable and able official elected by a careless constituency where the informed are too busy selling potatoes or practicing law to vote and the franchise is left to the self-seekers and special privilege grabbers.

The public official and the party in power will exert every effort to stay in power. The man and the party are anxious to please the majority. Generally, but there are exceptions, both are willing to veer with the wind and become conservative and liberal by turn when convinced of a popular demand. Both try to reflect the views of the electorate to which they must answer, but, unhappily, that electorate often votes on unpredictable impulse or emotion rather than from conviction born of logic.

The fourth premise is:

"Whether that private citizenship possesses the increased love of truth and freedom together with the understanding, conviction, and

courage necessary to the preservation in the pending crisis of all we count worthwhile, depends upon the college trained men and women of the recent past, the present, and the immediate future."

It ought not be necessary to argue this point. The world and its problems have become complex. The involved philosophies touching international affairs, economics, monetary policies, and many other facets of complicated government must be understood if right decisions are to be reached. Government can no longer be guided successfully by impulse and guess.

The trained mind of the community is respected and looked to for guidance. If the educated fail to respond or if they respond flippantly or selfishly, the general public must frequently reach erroneous conclusions.

Comparatively few of the business and professional people take the trouble even to vote—to say nothing of exerting considered influence. If members of those favored groups could be brought to devote some time to public issues and policies, good candidates would more often offer for public office.

If the informed and trained citizen is not willing to assist in politics, the candidate must turn to those blocs and minorities which have been organized to further special privilege objectives. And if he promises eternal sunshine and peace, more money and less work, and Utopia generally, he is simply appealing to the people who vote. Or, to put it another way, if those who should know better, decline to serve honorably as private citizens in politics, the candidate need not be expected to serve honorably as an official.

It is an idle waste of time for the otherwise substantial people who share no part in politics to decry the fallacies of government. We all know and count in our circle of friends, the many non-participants in politics who spend their time cavilling against the *status quo*, lambasting Congress and condemning what they conceive to be national subservience to minority groups. They are to be found on every corner sitting placidly in the sun of civic inertia, contemplating the past and avoiding the future. They, in effect, paraphrase Calhoun's words and say: "A power has arisen in the gov-

ernment greater than the people themselves, consisting of many and various and powerful bureaus, groups, minorities and interests, combined into one mass, and held together by the cohesive power of public plunder."

Actually, poetic justice has been done — those people are entitled to no more than they are receiving. The ultimate reward for their civic neglect must be the loss of the freedoms our forefathers secured for us.

If we are to win over great odds in these next few years, more well equipped minds must turn to the task with unselfishness, energy, and determination. If those minds carelessly and negligently fail to meet the challenge, the special purpose groups and organized minorities will devitalize this country as they devitalized France.

New people and new minds, youthful enthusiasm, dauntless devotion to ideals and a willingness to work constitute the essentials of a successful fight to safeguard freedom. The older generations are steeped in *laissez faire*. They have taken for granted those rights we now know must be fought for.

The concluding proposition:

"Every college trained American man and woman, wittingly or not, is a cog in the political machine and each will influence the end result. Whether that influence is good or bad, whether honorable service or disservice is rendered, is the free, but vital choice of the individuals."

The fact stated is admittedly elementary; unfortunately, it is also often ignored.

If a consciousness of the fact that each of us is a part of the nation's political life could be engraved indelibly in the minds of college trained students our problems would be much simpler. The average person wishes to be well regarded in the community. He is willing to assume his responsibilities — if he knows them, and if pressed by public opinion.

Many otherwise good citizens are oblivious to their political privileges and prerogatives. If, in a momentary urge, they decide

to vote, election day catches them unprepared to exercise good judgment. They will have had no part in the selection of the candidates, and when the time comes to choose between the candidates and select the officials, they often find none of those listed on the ballot qualified to serve. Honorable service in citizens' politics requires a day to day consciousness of individual rights and obligations — a sort of running stewardship over public affairs at all levels.

Possibly the sorriest of all citizens is the educated, travelled, and financially or professionally, successful member of the community who withholds his ability, judgment and influence from public affairs. The thieves and traitors present no great difficulty — we can put them away and protect the nation against their ravages — but there is no defense against the parasitical individual who saps all that is good from his community and contributes nothing, save minimum taxes, to its development. He sends his children to schools he criticizes and does nothing for. He submits his differences to courts he had no part in selecting. He is like the squirrel who gathers the nuts someone else grew.

America needs two, not three, not ten strong, political parties. They must be parties which stand on principle and present, for the choice of the people, basic issues. We recently experienced an election in which there was no real issue — the major, perhaps determining factor, was sort of an unreasoning desire for a change. Both parties promised higher standards of living, both proposed to end the Korean War and both advocated the adoption of a sound international policy. The party platforms were so similar as to be almost interchangeable. Both parties number the radical liberals and stand-patter conservatives among their members. Nevertheless, ill-defined as they are, those parties are necessary to our system of government.

Most citizens should belong to one party or the other. They should see to it that the party of their choice is sound in principle and manned by capable people of integrity. Then they should stand with that party, assuming responsibility for its shortcomings.

Those somewhat inconstant souls who dislike the idea of being a part of any one church, or one family, or one party, will serve as a good pendulum to swing between the established parties and assure alertness to public demand.

Honorable service by the citizen politician requires no sacrifice. Actually, little time and little effort is involved. Public affairs are public business and each of us is concerned. The school teacher is affected by the political decisions of the school board, the banker is touched by the regulations of the political Federal Reserve Board, the farmer by the rules of the political Secretary of Agriculture, the lawyer by a politically selected court, the automobile owner by the politically inspired tax and the home owner by the politically fixed exemptions.

We are all in politics. Whether we render honorable service or a disservice is the individual's choice. But, in making the choice, I hope we may remember what Pierpont in *A WORD FROM A PETITIONER* had to say:

"A weapon that comes down as still  
As snowflakes fall upon the sod;  
But executes a freeman's will,  
As lightning does the will of God;  
And from its force, nor doors nor locks  
Can shield you; 'tis the ballot-box."





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